

## **Chapter 7                      Education**

### **Introduction**

Harrisonburg is a city of education with two major universities, an excellent public school system, and highly regarded private schools. Many citizens of the City are affiliated with the schools, either working there or attending class, making school life a very important aspect of city life. The City is dedicated to making its public schools the best that they can be. Cooperation between City Council and the School Board is essential for meeting this broad goal. Cooperation between the City and the universities is also sought in efforts to meet many of the goals, objectives and strategies of this plan, from those supporting adult education to promotion of the arts (as discussed in Chapter 8) to economic development (as discussed in Chapter 13). The City wishes to continue its positive relationships with James Madison University and Eastern Mennonite University.

### **Background**

#### Schools

The City's Public Schools have adopted both vision and mission statements to guide their work.

*Vision Statement:* "Motivate, Educate, and Celebrate: Learning together for a better future."

*Mission Statement:* "Our mission is to prepare every student to succeed and to contribute to a better world. We will strive to do this in an academically-challenging, safe, and nurturing environment where all students, parents, and community members are active participants."

The schools strive to provide a quality education to every student who comes to them.

**School Facilities:** Approximately 11 percent of the City's total population is enrolled in the public school system. While school enrollment has decreased slightly in the last two years, the school division grew substantially during the previous decade primarily due to immigration. That growth resulted in the need for additional classroom space. In 2008, two new schools, Skyline Middle School and Smithland Elementary School, were opened.

The City's public school system currently operates eight public school facilities. The physical capacity of school buildings is a dynamic measurement, due in part to the changing standards that result from legislative requirements to provide additional services for special populations. The original "intended" or "design" capacities are larger than the current "actual" capacities, due to these changing requirements. Table 7-1 shows a summary of the physical plants, and shows the capacities of the current school facilities.

**Table 7-1: City of Harrisonburg School Facilities**

School	Date of Original Construction	Acreage
Harrisonburg High School	2005	63
Thomas Harrison Middle School	1989	34
Skyline Middle School (campus shared with SMES)	2008	Part of a 65 acre shared campus.
Keister Elementary School	1955	17
Smithland Elementary School (campus shared with SKMS)	2008	Part of a 65 acre shared campus.
Spotswood Elementary School	1960	16
Stone Spring Elementary School	1993	23
Waterman Elementary School	1911	9

Source: Harrisonburg City Public Schools, Five Year Capital Improvement Plan, 2009.

**Table 7-2: City of Harrisonburg School Capacities**

School	2008 Totals	2008 Building Total	Actual Capacity*	Intended Capacity**
Harrisonburg High School	1259	1276	<b>1350</b>	1550
Thomas Harrison Middle School	742	754	<b>915</b>	925
Skyline Middle School	489	493	<b>800</b>	876
Keister ES	390	431	<b>424</b>	492
Spotswood ES	335	374	<b>425</b>	493
Stone Spring ES	302	352	<b>488</b>	492
Smithland ES	399	433	<b>536</b>	600
Waterman ES	345	385	<b>447</b>	451
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,261</b>	<b>4,498</b>	<b>5,385</b>	<b>5,879</b>

Source: Harrisonburg City Public Schools.

\* Number of students the facility can accommodate while providing space for mandated or specialized programming.

\*\* Number of students the facility would accommodate w/o mandated or specialized programming, as originally designed.

With the opening of a new middle school and elementary school in the Fall of 2008, and the grade reconfiguration (K-4 at elementary schools and 5-8 at middle schools), the school division has addressed the overcrowding issues. The majority of the mobile classrooms that were used to address the gaps in available capacity have been removed. While no additional construction of schools is anticipated to be needed for several years, the next likely school project will be adding classroom space at Harrisonburg High School. This addition will not be needed for 5 to 10 years.

**School Services:** The school division offers an extremely wide range of services to the City's children in order to provide a quality education and meet individual student needs. Pre-school

classes at the elementary schools through college credit courses offered in our high school are available to students. Special Education classes and alternative education programs are also available for students who need them. Of the 4,261 total students in the system, 1,747 (41.0 percent) require English as a Second Language (ESL) services. (Note: The term English as a Second Language (ESL) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are analogous terms and are used interchangeably.) This is an extraordinarily high percentage compared to other jurisdictions in the Commonwealth. A relatively small proportion of the ESL student population has English language proficiency; most need extra help, which therefore requires additional staffing resources. Unless there are dramatic changes in the economic characteristics of the region, the City school system should expect the ESL population to continue to rise.

In recent years, federal and state legislative requirements have increased the challenges to the system. The school division annually reports achievement results for all students as a large group and the achievement of students is also reported in the following defined categories: students with disabilities, LEP students, economically disadvantaged students, white students, black students, and Hispanic students.

The City school system currently cooperates with the County school system through a joint consortium for purchasing (food supplies, etc.) and jointly operates the special education program for “low-incident” (low rate of occurrence) special populations in which shared services allows economies of scale for both systems. Massanutten Technical Center, which offers technical and vocational training and classes for high school and adult students, is also operated jointly by the City and County school systems.

**Future Needs and Planned Facilities:** As indicated in Table 7-2, the total current enrollment of the system is approximately 4,261 students. This reflects a decrease in our overall enrollment by 58 students from the 2007-08 school year. These trends are shown in Table 7-3. The School Board has set as a priority the construction or acquisition of a new school board office. Currently, the administrative staff is spread over two different facilities, which impacts efficiency.

**Table 7-3: City of Harrisonburg School Enrollment Trends**

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Number of Students</b>	4,274	4,419	4,319	4,261
<b>% Increase or Decrease from previous year</b>	+3.0%	+3.4%	-2.3%	-1.3%

Source: Harrisonburg City Public Schools.

Table 7-4 shows the school system’s forecast for future enrollments. The school system currently is planning for a future annual growth rate of 1.0 percent in the public school population based upon recent trends. The 1.0 percent growth factor is revisited annually. The following chart indicates that 236 total students will be added over a five year period.

**Table 7-4: City of Harrisonburg School Enrollment Forecasts**

Year	Enrollment	Increase/Decrease	Percentage
2010-2011	4360	+45 students	1.04%
2011-2012	4405	+45 students	1.04%
2012-2013	4451	+46 students	1.04%
2013-2014	4496	+46 students	1.04%

Source: Harrisonburg City Public Schools.

**Service and Facility Standards:** For instructional staffing, the system uses class size targets and state standards for special education. Maximum class size targets are:

- Grades K-3: 18, 19, 20 and 21 students per teacher, respectively
- Grades 4-5: 22 students per teacher
- Grades 6-8: 23 students per teacher (not formally adopted)
- Grades 9-12: 24 students per teacher (not formally adopted)

However, school funding may alter these targets, resulting in slightly higher class sizes.

For school sites, the system uses the following standards:

- Elementary School: 20 acres (gross)
- Middle School: 40 acres (gross)
- High School: 60 acres (gross)

## **Education Goal, Objectives and Strategies**

Goal 5. To provide a wide and equitably distributed range of educational opportunities for all ages.

Objective 5.1 To work with the School Board to assure the quality of public education and excellent educational outcomes for all enrolled children.

Objective 5.2 To continue to work with the School Board to monitor enrollment trends and projections to ensure quality educational facilities.

Strategy 5.2.1 To work collaboratively with the School Board on the implementation of school facility improvements.

Strategy 5.2.2 To assist the School Board in obtaining needed additional administrative space.

Strategy 5.2.3 To coordinate City staff and school staff annual estimates and forecasts of population and school enrollment.

Strategy 5.2.4 To hold annual meetings between the City Council and the School Board to review population growth and enrollment trends and discuss current and future school needs.

- Objective 5.3      To work with the School Board to encourage needed neighborhood elementary schools in underserved areas of the City.
- Strategy 5.3.1      To locate an elementary school in each quadrant of the City as the need arises.
- Strategy 5.3.2      To design all new schools to fit into their neighborhood.  
Consideration should be given to making them easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists, not dominated by parking lots, attractive, residential in scale and setback, well-landscaped, and with lighting designed not to intrude into the neighborhood.
- Objective 5.4      To promote educational programs for workforce development, training, retraining and life-long learning.
- Strategy 5.4.1      To ensure close communication between the Harrisonburg Department of Economic Development, Blue Ridge Community College, Massanutten Technical Center, Dayton Learning Center, and existing and prospective businesses regarding educational needs of the workforce.
- Strategy 5.4.2      To support Blue Ridge Community College in efforts to obtain grants for workforce development programs.
- Strategy 5.4.3      To encourage James Madison University, Eastern Mennonite University, Blue Ridge Community College, and Bridgewater College to make degree and enrichment courses available to City residents.